

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
NORTHERN DIVISION

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HARRY STEVE PETROS,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 2:08-cv-293

v.

Honorable R. Allan Edgar

BARBRA SAMPSON et al.,

Defendants.

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**OPINION**

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, and Plaintiff has paid the initial partial filing fee. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, Plaintiff's action will be dismissed for failure to state a claim.

## Discussion

### I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff currently is incarcerated at Hiawatha Correctional Facility. He pleaded guilty to operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 257.625(6)(d), and was sentenced on April 13, 2006 to a term of incarceration of eleven months to five years. (Compl. at 3, docket #1.) In his *pro se* complaint, Plaintiff states that he was denied parole after an interview with Defendant Atterberry. (*Id.*) Plaintiff asserts that it was an improper denial because it did not take into account his “misconduct-free institutional record, [that he] has completed all requirement and voluntary self-help programs with the highest scores available, [that he] has completed a 400-hour welding trades program, achieved a certificate and went on to tutor [in] the program.” (*Id.* at 5.) Plaintiff also notes that he scored a High Probability of Parole. (*Id.*) Plaintiff asserts that he was not given timely and adequate substantial and compelling reasons for the denial of his parole. (*Id.* at 5-7.) Plaintiff seeks to be released on parole. (*Id.* at 8.) He requests this Court void his parole denials and order a new parole hearing. (*Id.* at 9.)

### II. Seeking Release

A challenge to the fact or duration of confinement should be brought as a petition for habeas corpus and is not the proper subject of a civil rights action brought pursuant to § 1983. *See Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 484, 494 (1973) (the essence of habeas corpus is an attack by a person in custody upon the legality of that custody and the traditional function of the writ is to secure release from illegal custody). The Supreme Court has held that a state prisoner cannot make a cognizable claim under § 1983 for an alleged unconstitutional conviction or for “harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid” unless a prisoner shows

that the conviction or sentence has been “reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court’s issuance of a writ of habeas corpus . . . .” *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994) (citation omitted); *see also Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 646-48 (1997). However, in *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 544 U.S. 74, 81-82 (2005), the Supreme Court clarified the *Heck* rule, finding “that a state prisoner’s § 1983 action is barred (absent prior invalidation) – no matter the relief sought (damages or equitable relief), no matter the target of the prisoner’s suit (state conduct leading to conviction or internal prison proceedings) – if success in that action would necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of confinement or its duration.”) (emphasis in original). To the extent Plaintiff seeks release from prison, his action is barred under *Heck*. To the extent Plaintiff seeks a new parole hearing, under *Wilkinson*, his success would not necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of his continued confinement and does not appear to be *Heck*-barred. Nevertheless, assuming that Plaintiff’s action is cognizable under § 1983, it fails to state a claim as set forth herein.

### III. Failure to state a claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if ““it fails to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.”” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 127 S. Ct. 1955, 1964 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)); *see also Hishon v. King & Spalding*, 467 U.S. 69, 73 (1984). The standard requires that a “complaint must contain either direct or inferential allegations respecting all the material elements to sustain a recovery under some viable legal theory.” *Glassner v. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.*, 223 F.3d 343, 346 (6th Cir. 2001). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff’s allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Twombly*, 127 S. Ct. at 1965;

*Lewis v. ACB Business Serv., Inc.*, 135 F.3d 389, 405 (6th Cir. 1998) (holding that a court need not accept as true legal conclusions or unwarranted factual inferences). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 127 S. Ct. at 1974; *see also United States v. Ford Motor Co.*, 532 F.3d 496, 503 (6th Cir. 2008); *United States ex rel. Bledsoe v. Comty. Health Sys., Inc.*, 501 F.3d 493, 502 (6th Cir. 2007).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

Plaintiff claims that Defendants violated his due process rights by failing to provide valid substantial and compelling reasons for departing from the parole guidelines when denying his parole. To establish a procedural due process violation, a petitioner must prove that (1) he was deprived of a protected liberty or property interest, and (2) such deprivation occurred without the requisite due process of law. *Club Italia Soccer & Sports Org., Inc. v. Charter Twp. of Shelby*, 470 F.3d 286, 296 (6th Cir. 2006); *see also Swihart v. Wilkinson*, 209 F. App’x 456, 458 (6th Cir. 2006). Plaintiff fails to raise a claim of constitutional magnitude because he has no liberty interest in being released on parole. There is no constitutional or inherent right to be conditionally released before the expiration of a prison sentence. *Greenholtz v. Inmates of Neb. Penal & Corr. Complex*, 442 U.S. 1, 7 (1979). Although a state may establish a parole system, it has no duty to do so; thus, the presence of a parole system by itself does not give rise to a constitutionally protected liberty interest

in parole release. *Id.* at 7, 11; *Bd. of Pardons v. Allen*, 482 U.S. 369, 373 (1987). Rather, a liberty interest is present only if state law entitles an inmate to release on parole. *Inmates of Orient Corr. Inst. v. Ohio State Adult Parole Auth.*, 929 F.2d 233, 235 (6th Cir. 1991).

In *Sweeton v. Brown*, 27 F.3d 1162, 1164-165 (6th Cir. 1994) (en banc), the Sixth Circuit, noting “the broad powers of the Michigan authorities to deny parole,” held that the Michigan system does not create a liberty interest in parole. Subsequent to its 1994 decision, the Sixth Circuit has recognized the continuing validity of *Sweeton* and has continued to find that Michigan’s parole scheme creates no liberty interest in being released on parole. See *Ward v. Stegall*, 93 F. App’x 805, 806 (6th Cir. 2004); *Martin v. Ohio Adult Parole Auth.*, 83 F. App’x 114, 155 (6th Cir. 2003); *Bullock v. McGinnis*, 5 F. App’x 340, 342 (6th Cir. 2001); *Turnboe v. Stegall*, No. 00-1182, 2000 WL 1679478, at \*1 (6th Cir. Nov. 1, 2000); *Hawkins v. Abramajtys*, No. 99-1995, 2000 WL 1434695, at \*2 (6th Cir. Sept. 19, 2000); *Irvin v. Mich. Parole Bd.*, No. 99-1817, 2000 WL 800029, at \*2 (6th Cir. June 14, 2000); *Clifton v. Gach*, No. 98-2239, 1999 WL 1253069, at \*1 (6th Cir. Dec. 17, 1999).

Also, in unpublished decisions, the Sixth Circuit has held that particular parts of Michigan’s statutory parole scheme do not create a liberty interest in parole. See *Fifer v. Mich. Dep’t of Corr.*, No. 96-2322, 1997 WL 681518, at \*1 (6th Cir. Oct. 30, 1997); *Moran v. McGinnis*, No. 95-1330, 1996 WL 304344, at \*2 (6th Cir. June 5, 1996); *Leaphart v. Gach*, No. 95-1639, 1995 WL 734480, at \*2 (6th Cir. Dec. 11, 1995); *Vertin v. Gabry*, No. 94-2267, 1995 WL 613692, at \*1 (6th Cir. Oct. 18, 1995); *Neff v. Johnson*, No. 92-1818, 1993 WL 11880, at \*1 (6th Cir. Jan. 21, 1993); *Janiske v. Mich. Dep’t of Corr.*, No. 91-1103, 1991 WL 76181, at \*1 (6th Cir. May 9, 1991); *Haynes v. Hudson*, No. 89-2006, 1990 WL 41025, at \*1 (6th Cir. Apr. 10, 1990). In addition, the

Michigan Supreme Court has recognized that there exists no liberty interest in parole under the Michigan system. *Glover v. Mich. Parole Bd.*, 596 N.W.2d 598, 603-04 (Mich. 1999).

Furthermore, the Sixth Circuit has held that the presence of specific parole guidelines does not lead to the conclusion that parole release is mandated upon reaching a “high probability of parole.” *Carnes v. Engler*, 76 F. App’x 79, 80 (6th Cir. 2003). In *Carnes*, the plaintiff argued that the Michigan parole scheme created a liberty interest in parole because it places severe restrictions on the board’s discretion to grant or deny parole, and because it requires the board to provide “substantial and compelling reasons” for departing from the parole guidelines. The Sixth Circuit rejected the plaintiff’s arguments, holding that “the ultimate authority to grant parole still lies with the discretion of the parole board.” 2003 WL 22177118, at \*1.

As stated by the Supreme Court, a state’s scheme may be specific or general in defining the factors to be considered by the parole authority without necessarily mandating parole. *Greenholtz*, 442 U.S. at 7-8. At the time that *Sweeton* was decided, there were statutory factors to be considered by the parole board. See *Sweeton*, 27 F.3d at 1165 n.1 (noting that MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.235 listed “a large number of factors to be taken into account by the board”). Although the current parole guidelines may be more detailed than the former statutory provision, they are still nothing more than factors that are considered by the board in assessing whether parole is appropriate. *Carnes*, 76 F. App’x at 80.

Until Plaintiff has served his five-year maximum sentence, he has no reasonable expectation of liberty. In the absence of a liberty interest, even an allegation of arbitrary or capricious denial of release on parole states no federal claim. See *Haynes*, 1990 WL 41025, at \*1. The discretionary parole system in Michigan holds out “no more than a mere hope that the benefit

will be obtained.” *Greenholtz*, 442 U.S. at 11. The Michigan Parole Board’s failure or refusal to consider petitioner for parole, therefore, implicates no federal right. In the absence of a liberty interest, petitioner fails to state a claim for a violation of his procedural due process rights.

### Conclusion

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff’s action will be dismissed for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c).

The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons that the Court dismisses the action, the Court discerns no good-faith basis for an appeal. Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$455.00 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, e.g., by the “three-strikes” rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$455.00 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ 2/4/09 \_\_\_\_\_

/s/ R. Allan Edgar  
R. Allan Edgar  
United States District Judge